

A Hall With Jazz on Its Mind

Basing a Season On Performers And New Works

By BEN RATLIFF

Jazz at Lincoln Center's first season in its \$128 million new home in the Time Warner Center at Columbus Circle will be a dialogue between the music and where it will be played. It's a program — starting in the fall and to be announced today — that has been carefully thought out from the moment the organization began to conceive the hall's physical space six years ago.

Jazz at Lincoln Center's Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra will perform in a space that accommodates dancing. There will be simultaneous concerts in larger and smaller spaces dealing with single-composer themes: Dizzy Gillespie in October and Thad Jones next May.



Jack Vartoogian

Wynton Marsalis, near left, artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center, whose new home opens in the fall.

For jazz collaborations — with dance companies, with the Boys Choir of Harlem, with Bill Cosby and with the librettist and author Diane Charlotte Lampert — Rose Theater, the largest of the three performance spaces, will be adjusted accordingly. The ceiling can be dropped; towers of seats can be moved to offer a choice between theater in the round or the more conventional proscenium arrangement.

form. It's there, and it's great for its function. But our hall is based on different principles."

Mr. Marsalis, wearing a suit and a hard hat and clutching a trumpet bag, spoke during a walk through the site on Monday as a few hundred workers continued to ready the hall for its Oct. 18 opening. It is

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For the Coolest Vibes: Accentuate Acoustics, Eliminate City Noise

By JON PARELES

Only an acoustician would have second thoughts about getting a new home with floor-to-ceiling, 50-by-90-foot windows overlooking Central Park. Those windows, at the center of the fifth and sixth stories of the Time Warner Center on Columbus Circle, will be both the public face and the most serious acoustical challenge for Jazz at Lincoln Center's new home, the Frederick P. Rose Hall.

As the world's first performance center built for jazz, the hall represents a milestone for jazz as an American art form. "Everybody was aware that we were doing something historic," said Wynton Marsalis, the artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center, who calls the organization's new home "the House of Swing." Construction is scheduled to be completed in July, and opening night, after a summer of private "tuning" concerts and adjustments, is set for Oct. 18.

The project commits \$128 million and prime real estate to recognize the lasting importance of music that was born in the streets. "There is no precedent for it," said Rafael Viñoly, the project's architect. "It's not an easy thing, and it's not a sure thing."

Placed in the middle of the Time Warner Center, just above upscale stores and swank restaurants, the hall could be taken as a symbol that jazz is a luxury. Mr. Marsalis rejects that notion. "Since we began, we have done all we can do to reach out into the community to say that this music is here and it's music for the people," he said. "And this is the people's hall. It's built with the people's money." New York City provided \$28 million of the \$128 million budgeted for Rose Hall, while New York State contributed \$3.5 million and the federal government \$2.2 million. Jazz at Lincoln Center has already raised all but the final \$14 million from private donors.

When the Time Warner Center was being planned, the city required that it include a significant presence for the arts. Under the opera-loving Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, that initially was to mean an opera house. Through successful politicking, Jazz at Lincoln Center was awarded the 100,000-square-foot space with the support of Mr. Giuliani and his successor, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg. Part of the new jazz institution will still be able to stage full-scale operas. But it has been designed around jazz and jazz education. Unlike

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expected to be substantially completed in July. Over whining power saws and the crackle of welding torches, Mr. Marsalis occasionally stopped to play the trumpet to test the acoustics in various spaces.

Since 1991, when it became an official constituent of Lincoln Center, Jazz at Lincoln Center has used Alice Tully and Avery Fisher Halls for most of its concerts, respectable cultural landmarks that are nevertheless physically hostile to the sound of jazz percussion. No proper concert hall had ever been built specifically for the sound of jazz.

The new jazz center, collectively known as Frederick P. Rose Hall, contains two, the 1,100-to-1,231-seat Rose Theater and the 310-to-550-seat Allen Room, which has a 50-foot-high glass wall overlooking the southern edge of Central Park from the fifth and sixth floors of the new Time Warner Center. A third space, Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, will seat 140 in a nightclub setting and present nightly shows, including Tuesday-to-Sunday engagements of a single band, the practice common to New York's jazz clubs. Together, the

three theaters will represent a staggeringly large addition to live jazz in New York.

But Mr. Marsalis says the organization would not change its programming philosophy to ensure that seats are filled. The hall's first season, kicked off by a three-week festival, will instead expand on the ideas that Jazz at Lincoln Center has historically put forth in its programming. There are few obvious bookings, the sort of "off the rack" touring acts that jazz festivals around the country regularly present. You will not see many of jazz's biggest names, like Sonny Rollins, Keith Jarrett, Ornette Coleman or Diana Krall.

Mr. Marsalis and his staff have developed Jazz at Lincoln Center as a "producer," organizing special semi-educational concerts around performers and commissioning new works from them. They have less interest in acting as a "presenter," putting established musicians onstage to do what they normally do. Understanding that distinction is crucial to understanding what the organization is trying to do.

"Insofar as what people might say when they look at this schedule," Mr. Marsalis said, "there are

a lot of people. That means a lot will be said. The question is: Who do you listen to? But we don't program based on that. We have objective style programming, we have categories of programming, we have meetings where we discuss the pros and cons, and then we go out and try to get what we can. The one thing we

Less interest in putting big-name musicians onstage.

don't want to do is to cut ourselves off from the glorious achievement we already have made."

Mr. Marsalis said he was also steadfast in his commitment to jazz as the central focus of the hall and would not incorporate other kinds of music — from Latin music to opera — without acknowledging a jazz connection. A large proportion of concerts will feature the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra or its newer band, the Afro-Latin Jazz Orches-

tra. And a remarkable number of concerts feature new works by Mr. Marsalis himself. One is "Suite for Human Nature," which will have its premiere in concerts on Dec. 16 to Dec. 19. Mr. Marsalis based the piece on a libretto by Ms. Lampert.

The invitation-only opening concert of the festival, on Oct. 18, includes Mr. Marsalis's brother Branford Marsalis, the saxophonist, and the singer Abbey Lincoln as guest performers; the fall gala on Oct. 20 includes the singer Patti Austin; Bill Cosby will be master of ceremonies for another Jazz Orchestra concert, on Oct. 21; a show on Oct. 25 addresses the music of Count Basie and Duke Ellington; "Let Freedom Swing," from Oct. 28 to Oct. 30, sets famous human-rights speeches to newly commissioned pieces of music; and "Jazz in Motion" (Nov. 3 to 5) pairs the orchestra with various dance companies.

An ambitious series of concerts on the blues will be held on Oct. 25 to 27. They will span African roots music, country and soul and will feature performances by Taj Mahal, Randy Weston, Mamadou Diabate, Mark O'Connor, Ricky Skaggs, the Holmes Brothers and Houston Person. The singers Cassandra Wil-

son, Dianne Reeves and Freddy Cole will perform in separate late-October concerts, as will the idiosyncratic Brazilian musician and composer Hermeto Pascoal, who seldom performs in America.

The first big event of the season proper is on Nov. 12 and 13: a jazz-and-film presentation of clips from Ken Burns's new documentary on the boxer Jack Johnson and some new original music written for it by Mr. Marsalis. In February comes a new series of concerts dealing with the impact of great American songwriters on jazz. The first (Feb. 17 to 19) features the pianist Bill Charlap. The guitarist John Scofield and pianist Brad Mehldau will join forces in a group on March 11 to 12; the SF Jazz Collective, a formidable group convened by the San Francisco jazz presenter SF Jazz, will also perform in March, as will the singers Kurt Elling and Luciana Souza.

The pianists Marcus Roberts and Jason Moran bring in their trios for an evening of new commissioned work on April 22 and 23. And the Jazz Orchestra's trombonist Ron Westray will pilot the band from May 5 to May 7 in a new piece he has written based on stories from Cervantes's "Don Quixote."

Concerts for younger audiences and lectures on music dot the schedule as well. The Ertegun Jazz Hall of Fame, open to the public, contains changing education kiosks, outlining the history of jazz on computer screens and in glass cases. A number of classrooms and a large recording studio have been built on-site, specifically addressing the needs of jazz.

Through the season, and in the summer months, other Lincoln Center constituents and outside arts producers will be renting the halls for their own use; most of the available dates have already been reserved through the end of this year.

Tickets for all events go on sale at noon on Friday on the organization's Web site, jazzatlincolncenter.org. In some ways the programming is running ahead of the construction's financing; \$14 million is still to be raised. But Lisa Schiff, chairwoman of the organization's board, said there was strong interest from many potential donors.

"The closer we get to opening," she said, "and the more visual it is, where it's not just a mass of concrete and you're stepping over wires and boards, then it's easier for investors to grasp."